

**SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR SECURE
DISTRIBUTION AND EVALUATION OF COMPRESSED
DIGITAL INFORMATION**

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A method for controlling access to digital information is performed based on a plurality of decryption keys sent by the information provider. A first type of decryption key instructs a user's host system to reproduce the digital information in accordance with a first level of reproduction quality degradation. Additional keys may specify other degradation levels. The quality of the digital information may be degraded by a fixed degree or a variable degree based on a function of a time condition and/or a use condition. Alternatively, only a portion of the information may be reproduced for a user or reproduction prevented. In order to obtain full and unrestricted access, the user must obtain a type of decryption key from the provider which removes all previous limitations on reproduction quality degradation. Preferably, the digital information is sent with a media player application program embedded with an initial decryption key. The program may include tamper-resistant features which provide a safeguard against hackers or other forms of unauthorized access. A business method uses a pricing structure which makes the decryption keys available for different prices.